

EUROPEAN
"TRASH"
CINEMA



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Craig Ledbetter
P. O. Box 5347
Kingwood, TX 77325

Co-Editor: Jenice Ledbetter

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Welcome to yet another double issue of ETC. Last issue, devoted to DEATH
LAID AN EGG, was a huge success and confirms my thoughts on the open-
mindedness of my readers. This issue is a return to ETC's usual format
and contains both new and old contributors. Tim Lucas returns with a
review of Jesus Franco's MACISTE VS THE AMAZON QUEEN. Tim's VIDEO
WATCHDOG will make its debut in June and will be, I predict, the
publishing event of the year. Lucas Baldo is back with a review of a
very obscure Italian Giallo that even I had never heard of. As usual,
Lucas packs his review with lots of interesting tidbits of information.
Since bootleg copies of the Romero/Arqueto collaboration 2 EVIL EYES have
begun appearing stateside, I imposed upon Max Belle More (who supplied the
ed set) to review the film shortly after he saw it at a local Italian
Bijou. This go around, David Keesee makes his ETC debut. He is/was a
contributor to the excellent British zine SHOCK X-PRESS. It was indeed
his reviews of two very obscure Klaus Kinski films that convinced me of
his talent. I'm ecstatic that David contacted me about writing for ETC
and was overwhelmed by his review of THE MONK. Finally, a lot of times
I'll receive a letter from someone who I feel can write an excellent
review. Dennis Locantore more than convinced me that he could do just
that. Read his commentary on FLAVIA and see if you agree. I hope to have
more from him in the future. Speaking of which; next issue will consist
of the following: Gale Pierce's European news column; reviews by Michael
Secule (SANGRE DI VIRGINES); Jeff Gung (PHANTOM OF DEATH); Conrad Widener
(TOMB OF TORTURE); John Martin (ENIGMA ROSSO AKA TRAUMA) and Steve Bogdan
(RETURN OF THE EVIL DEAD). Adios.

News Flash - ETC is going quarterly due to
heavy work schedule!

MACISTE CONTRE LA REINE DES AMAZONES
("Maciste vs. the Amazon Queen," 1973)

By Tim Lucas

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Franco's "Maciste" films, which sound like his only excursions into the papio (or sword-and-sandol) genre, are hardly what they seem to be.

The Maciste character was born in Gabriola d'Annunzio's script for Giovanni Pastrone's silent epic Cabiria (1914), about the injustices endured and overcome by a muscular everyman in pre-Christian Rome. The larger-than-life role was embodied -- after a long search -- by a massive, Genoese dockworker named Bartolomeo Pagano, discovered by Sergio Leone's father! Pagano proved an enormous hit with audiences, so much so that he adopted "Maciste" as his professional name for fifteen sequels, which were set in various centuries (even modern times) to give the character a dimension of immortality d'Annunzio never intended.

Years later, when Pietro Francisci's Hercules (La fatica di Ercole, 1957) rejuvenated the then-waning Italian cinema, the subsequent explosion of papio brought many musclemen from mythology out of retirement. In addition to Samson, Ulysses and the rest, Maciste himself was recruited to the ranks of the gods. As Maciste held no historic resonance for American moviegoers, the name was almost always apologetically dubbed into "Hercules" or something similar in the stateside release versions; one American release went so far as to invent "Macistus" (which meant nothing) rather than leave the original name intact! The role was played by such heroic actors as Rag Park, Gordon Scott, Gordon Mitchell and Mark Forest, who played Maciste in at least five films.

Franco's two Maciste films in no way resemble the earlier series, but apparently not for lack of trying. As Franco confided to Lucas Balbo in 1986, "For (MACISTE CONTRE LA REINE DES AMAZONES) I originally wanted Mark Forest for the Maciste role, so I phoned his agent in Italy. A few days later, I got word that 'he' agreed. So everything was ready for shooting, then I got a phone call saying 'Everything is settled: Mr. Steve Forrest will arrive at Orly Airport and you'll have to get him from there, because he doesn't know Paris!' That was a disaster -- he confused Mark Forest with Steve Forrest! Anyway, it was done without either of them."

The mind boggles at what the S.W.A.T. star's reaction might have been to find himself -- at age 50, in a strange country -- being told to strip for the cameras and simulate riotous intercourse with Alice Arno, Lina Honey and 30 bare-breasted Amazonian extras! This posed no problem, however, for expatriate German actor Wal Davis (Waldemar Wohlfaht), a veteran of such softcore fare as Jose Luis Madrid's The Horrible Sexy Vampire (1978). However, gameness (and a certain

coproduction cachet) are the only attributes in Wohlfahrt's favor; not only is he the least endowed actor ever to play Maciste, he is the least endowed star of any pepla (even Michael Forest -- another Forest! -- Roger Corman's Atlas (1960) was more imposing), which says much about the subversive intentions behind these two films.

Made nearly a full decade after the petering-out of the pepla cycle, Franco's "Maciste" films exhibit no delusions of contributing to, or reviving the cycle -- quite the contrary. In the relentlessly sappy dimensions of its macho mouthfeel and redundant romance, MACISTE CONTRE LA REINE DES AMAZONES works as a preposterous and brazen ghetto of the pepla, a genre for which one imagines Franco had little patience.

MACISTE CONTRE LA REINE DES AMAZONES follows Maciste and his friend Pinder on a mercenary mission to the jungles of Antigue (we see no Amazon River, incidentally), from which Pinder has eluded a tribe of topless Amazons with news of a fabulous treasure. Maciste doesn't realize that Pinder has been promised a share of the gold upon the delivery of sexual supemen Maciste to the Amazons' village. Both men are immediately imprisoned on their arrival: the dark-featured (allegedly small-penised) Pinder with his Amazon lover Julia are tied to stakes, while blonde Maciste is literally gang-banged by every Amazon in town, in hopes that this will sap his renowned strength, as well as impregnate them with a new generation of bare-breasted warriors. When Maciste frees a virgin sacrifice from her date with Yuke, the fire-god, the Amazon Queen challenges him to a nude duel, which he wins by disarming and then sexually subduing her and her entire Amazon army. Meanwhile, the wily Pinder and Julie are freed by the Queen's handmaiden, who has formed a ménage à trois with them, but all three are shot with arrows while trying to escape with the treasure in tow. While the Amazons sleep off their erotic swoons, Maciste finds the treasure chest (we don't get a look inside, just a glimpse of two cheap costume necklaces he dangles before the camera) and beats the pygmy spear-chucker who guards it. Betrayed by his friends, Maciste is invited by the Amazon Queen to stay with her forever in Antigue, but he escapes at the earliest opportunity to seek new erotic adventures, without so much as a trinket for a souvenir.

Dispensing absolutely with the style and opulence the Italians brought to the pepla cycle, Franco confronts us with what is left: Maciste performs all of his extraordinary feats where the audience always knew they occurred -- in bed; the MacGuffin emptiness of the Amazonian religion is brought up front (the Amazons' firegod is nothing more than a talking candle); the sexuality of the Amazons is directly addressed (we are often introduced to them by a slaver's zoom-out from their crotches and buttocks); and, most amazingly of all, the rampant disregard of the pepla for historical accuracy is parodied by an utter lack of temporal continuity. The film opens in 15th Century Italy, to judge by the costumes, from whence Maciste and Pinder (whose arm sports a large, 20th Century tattoo!) easily transport themselves -- in decidedly more contemporary dress -- to the Amazon. The film makes even less temporal sense when considered alongside its sequel, which pits Maciste against the same

Amazon tribe (including the previously "killed" Line Honey), with the same locations posing as Atlantis!

To overlook the film's satiric intentions and approach it only for what it is, is to find a below-average exploitation film enlivened mostly by Robert Viger's evocative, above-average score and a crisp, bird-haunted soundtrack. Also worth noting is the lengthy, single-take scene in which a wild-eyed Line Honey deals herself -- with insistent pokes from a dagger -- into the sexual alliance between Robert Woods and Kati Hanns. In delineating a dramatic arc that takes her from intruder to fiend to lover, Honey hurls herself into the moment with the same ferocious abandon on display in LA COMTESSE NOIRE/LA COMTESSE AUX SENS SUS/LES AVALÉUSES, an intensity which strangely became more erratic as she gained experience in films.

Howard Vernon, who was briefly featured in the simultaneously-lensed sequel, LES EXPLOITS ÉROTIQUES DE MACISTE DANS L'ATLANTIDE, contributed to both films by working as a focus puller and still photographer, under his real name of Mario Lippert. Also worth knowing is that Chantal Broquet, a statuesque brunette with arresting eyes who appears as one of Alice Arno's handmaidens, is Arno's real-life sister.

Franco returned to his topless Amazons, and their treasure lore, for EL TEMPLO DE ORO DE LAS AMAZONAS ("Golden Temple Amazons") in 1984.



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TWO EVIL EYES (DUE OCCHI DIABOLICI)

(1990, Italy)

Directed by George Romero & Dario Argento

Reviewed by Max Dalla Mora

First, I have to say that I wasn't expecting too much from this new anthology movie directed by two of the most creative minds in the cinema; George Romero and Dario Argento, together again after that milestone of cinema, **DAWN OF THE DEAD**. Judging from the TV trailers, the movie didn't look very interesting, turned out I was half correct. The first episode is by Romero, **THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. VALDEMAR**. It's your typical revenge-from-the-grave plot with very TV-ish caste. **THE STRANGE CASE** is like a **TALKIE FROM THE DARKSIDE** episode lifted from the small screen and transported to the silver one. Even if there's some tension in parts of it (thanks to the effective building to a scene where a weird looking staircase to the cellar contains a talking, frozen body), the episode is unbalanced as

if Romero couldn't choose between a gory or more classical type approach. There's some blood yes, but it's forced into the story, as if Romero put it there to demonstrate that he's the guy who gave splatter a respectable name. Also, I think that the "voice from beyond the grave" is simply grotesque and involuntarily comical. You see this half dead, yellow-faced, bearded man talking with the intonation of constipation! A very effective scene occurs when the spectators from beyond

appear; white, flashing figures who look like mannequin from Hall.

The Dario Argento episode, **THE BLACK CAT** is gory, sick and shows the usual camera wizardry the Italian director is known for, such as a wonderful cat P.O.V. Perhaps the plot contains too many elements which complicate the plot (while the Romero episode is very simple and basic). But in any case, it is very interesting. There's the body of a girl cut in half by a pendulum, a man (Tom Savini) that excavates his sister, pulling out all her teeth, a photographer specializing in pictures of the dead (haha Argento shows us a glimpse of real cadaver pictures like in **MACCHIE SOLARI/AUTOPSY**) who tortures in front of the camera, his wife's black cat, and so on. **THE BLACK CAT** is extremely violent, especially toward animals; in fact, at the end of the episode the production assures us that all the cats used were proper; however, I'm not so sure.

Argento has put in as many allusions to Poe as possible, without going straight to the meat of the plot, a method usually adapted for short subjects. Sometimes, I feel Argento showed too much without telling us anything, but as we know, he likes to experiment with various possibilities offered by the camera. **TWO EVIL EYES** unfortunately has only one eye, the other is an empty, dry socket.

FLAVIA LA MONACA MUSULMANA

(1974, Italy)

Directed by Gianfranco Mingozzi

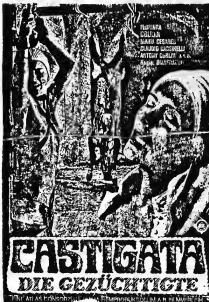
Reviewed by Dennis Locantore

Like most other readers of ETC, I have been doing research from various sources to familiarize myself with the titles of interest. Likewise, with video sources for this more obscure material, we waded through the worst cinema in the world in quest of those unmitigated gems that make all the drek we watch, mainly out of the urge to be thorough, worthwhile. For

those of you that have not seen this film...it is definitely one of those titles that makes going through so much trash worthwhile.

The most important source material which has brought many of the films of other nations to our collective attention is Phil Hardy's Encyclopedia of Horror Films, which gives this film a rather unflattering review. It is a highly unfair diatribe which classifies the film in approach perhaps one step above I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE in misogyny.

The film is set in 1244, (the 13th century not the 15th as noted by Hardy) before the Saracen Invasion of Italy. The story of Flavia, (Florinda Bolken) who is banished to a convent after her awakening adolescent drives and inherent kindness are about to be demonstrated to a soldier in the opening scene. This establishes a starting point for a



number of themes and, aside from being unpredictably handled, are also memorable and disturbing.

After her father alienates her, (it is demonstrated that her father also has a sadistic edge towards women generally) she is witness to rape, torture and degradations from one of the more brutal sects at the time.

She then attempts unsuccessfully to escape her forced bondage to the order with a Jewish man she befriends. In reaction against the macho Italian society which is shown in so uncertain terms to condone the spread of all forms of sexual sadism, Flavia joins forces with the Muslims after their invasion of Italy. We'd love to be able to translate the dialogue in this scene which sees Flavia and an older nun watching the approaching Muslims by sea from a high cliff (the older nun is a crazed looking and sounding character) but for those who don't understand the language it is still quite obvious in the way the scene is acted that the older nun (I'd love to know who played her) is applauding their arrival. Flavia's joining of the Muslims is motivated socially against all men and the macho society that ameliorates the latent misogyny causing sexual sadism against women. In doing so, Flavia, duplicates the sadistic pleasure of her tormentors.

As should be obvious from this synopsis, the point of view of the film is not exploitive. Former documentarian, Gianfranco Mingozzi (as far as we can determine, this is his only non-documentary) is a talented director with an amazing sense of wrath and firmly rooted cinematic sensibilities. He's also a sensationalist with a purpose. The many violent scenes in this movie stem solely from the motivations of the characters desire to degrade sexually the adversary, not just to eliminate him of her. Beginning with a decapitation, and animal castration (not faked), burning (with hot oil), a woman's nipple before cutting them off, men being sodomized, female rape, male rape (attempted), through various inquisition style tortures and converging in the extremely disgusting flaying (skinning-alive) of Flavia at the end; the scenes are not the product of someone who is solely interested (in Phil Hardy's words) in "the salability of sexual sadism". This is what the film is examining. The fact is that any titillation involved in these images rapidly leaves the viewer and is rapidly replaced by repulsion. The whole look of the movie is that of the frescos it uses in some really impressive fantasy sequences. . Directed with a classicism and fluid long takes, it makes one wonder why Mingozzi never again directed (again as far as we know) another non-documentary feature.

I highly recommend this film which is available from "Domovideo" in a beautifully mastered print. The actual video company is P.A.C. (the same people who produced the film), and just to let collectors know the packaging is not the cheap cardboard box that commercial videocassettes usually come in to cut costs. If you are interested in another fine film of Mingozzi's, check out (if you can find a copy) "BELLISSIMO: IMAGES OF THE ITALIAN CINEMA" (Italcoos Video), an excellent overview of the Italian cinema featuring interviews with Fellini, Argento, Avati, and Nicola Piovani (who composed the excellent Morricone-like score for FLAVIA).

LE MOINE/THE MONK

by David Kerekes
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Devilry and passion set in the Middle Ages!

LE MOINE aka THE MONK is a story of "fornication, sorcery and murder" in the days of the Inquisition. It tells of the fall from grace of Father Ambrosio who, after thirty years of virtue in the sanctity of a Capuchin monastery, is lured into a nightmare world of lust and depravity.

On Sundays, Father Ambrosio (Franco Nero) preaches in church of the virtues in living with the virg'nity of the spirit as well as that of the body, while it is rumored among the congregation that so spiritually clean is Father Ambrosio he is not able to tell the difference between a man and a woman, and so widespread is Ambrosio's devotion that many flock from miles around to hear his preach. Another rumor among the congregation is that Ambrosio is one of the apostles reincarnate; it may not, therefore, be outside Kyrkou's intention that Nero should be cast in the universally accepted image of Christ, having as he does dark shoulder-length hair, flowing mousetache and beard.

Brother John is not quite the chaotic novice he would have Father Ambrosio believe he is. One day within the grounds of the monastery, Brother John confronts the good Father and reveals himself to be a beautiful woman - Matilda - in disguise. She tells him that she is prepared to live a lie as a monk, so great is her infatuation with Ambrosio (it's probably as well that the rumors concerning Father Ambrosio's ignorance of the male and female form have already been circulated in THE MONK, because Matilda's hood hardly hides the features of a beautiful woman successfully from the likes of you or me, right?). Though Ambrosio runs in shock from this revelation, it isn't long before he is being seduced by Matilda on the floor of his cell.

From here on the monk's days are numbered, tortured as he is between his new found love for Matilda and his devotion to Christ. When he kneels in front of a picture of the Virgin Mary to pray for guidance, he sees the picture become that of his seductress. Still, this doesn't stop Ambrosio managing to mete out a punishment to a nun who is found in possession of love letters. When the nun also admits to having a lover and to being pregnant, Ambrosio is quick to call her "an open sore, an abscess!" and announces that there is nothing left for the girl but the tortures of the Grand Inquisition, to which the nun hysterically replies, "may your cock dry up and shrivel like parchment!" Interestingly enough, it is with the nun's final cries as she is led away that the real themes behind THE MONK are exemplified - as undoubtedly are those of co-scriptwriter Luis Bunuel - "Chastity is unnatural!"

Father Ambrosio and Matilda meet in secret and make love often. As time passes, Ambrosio's love for Matilda changes into an infatuation of the flesh, and it isn't long before he has fallen for a virtuous young girl from the village called Antonia. Antonia has a sick mother which makes an ideal excuse for frequent visits by Ambrosio, not that an excuse is necessary, everyone welcomes the very religious man with open arms.

Besides Ambrosio, Matilda and Antonia, THE MONK has a fourth major character, that of the Duke. With the introduction of The Duke - one of the benefactor's of the church - THE MONK seems to take on the sexual proportions of Pasolini's THE DECAMERON, what with Ambrosio beside himself with lust for the little Antonia while the Duke, in league with his mistress, runs a child prostitution racket beneath his castle (at nine years old he already refers to the children as "haga"). All four paths are soon to cross. In the meantime however, Ambrosio makes a clumsy attempt at raping Antonia.

On a visit to give Antonia's sick mother his blessing, Ambrosio takes time out to hear confession in Antonia's bedroom. Upon hearing a scream the sick mother enters the room, only to find the monk trying to tear her daughter's clothes off. Ambrosio is duly thrown out of the house and warned never to return.

Back at the monastery, Matilda tells the Monk how he can have the girl. Ambrosio denounces further invitation, he may have already committed sin but still fears God enough not to allow himself to yield any further. But Ambrosio's spirit is weak. Matilda shows the Monk a mirror and in the mirror is the image of a nude Antonia preparing herself for her bed. The vision in the mirror is too much for Ambrosio and he succumbs to Matilda's promises.

In a cave outside the monastery, Matilda prepares to evoke a spell which will grant the monk power over Antonia. Ambrosio is advised to stay within the confines of a pentagram on the ground. At the height of the spell the Devil himself appears, leaves a magic 'metal branch' then disappears. The spell is complete.

That same night Ambrosio makes his way to Antonia's house. He sneaks in and waves the 'magic branch' over the sleeping girl as instructed: Antonia will not be able to stir from her sleep. In the bedroom next door, as the monk is drawing the covers from Antonia's bed, Antonia's mother begins to have a strange dream. She dreams that her daughter is on top of a high building, wavering dangerously close to the edge as if in a trance. Back in reality in Antonia's room, the monk is rubbing the sleeping girl's breasts. Back in the dream Antonia falls from the building. Disturbed enough by the dream to awaken Antonia's mother goes to check on her daughter. She finds the monk once again about to have his way. Ambrosio struggles with the woman and kills her. He runs from the house as the spell breaks and Antonia awakes screaming.

The Inquisition catch up with the monk and in a cell, leave a lone confessor to extract a confession of "sorcery and murder" from him. Before the monk can be subjected to any torture however, the confessor suddenly backs away from Ambrosio crying "You! Leave Me! Leave Me!", collapses on the floor and - oddly if not rather conveniently for Ambrosio - dies of shock. Ambrosio makes good his chance to escape and retreats to the hills to pray for the Lord's forgiveness, while purging himself on thorns and anything else he can lay his back on.

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It isn't long before Matilda turns up, convincing the monk once again to allow her to be his guide in this, his hour of need. With this guidance, nor is it long before the two fugitives find themselves at the gates of the Duke's castle. The Duke offers them sanctuary, speaking of the "great injustice" that has brought the holy man here, while entertaining his guests in a game of 'chicken-bashing': a blindfolded party is given a club and attempts to brain a chicken which has been buried up to its neck in sand.

The rumors concerning Ambrosio's mis-adventures are common knowledge to all at the castle, as are the rumors of the monk's fatal infatuation with the child called Antonia. Is it insight on the Duke's part then, or further manipulation by the evil Matilda that the Duke should have kidnapped the beautiful Antonia on the death of her mother and had her brought to the castle? The Duke takes great pleasure in telling Ambrosio of Antonia's confinement in the castle and allowing him to spend time alone with her. Locked in a chamber with the girl, Ambrosio savors the moment; this time there can be no interruptions! But once again he is thwarted. Antonia - to the monk's horror - turns into her dead mother! The dead woman moves towards Ambrosio inviting him to make love to her, the corpse speaking without opening her mouth. Ambrosio stabs the woman in terror, but the corpse that slumps to the floor turns out to be not that of the already dead woman but that of his Beloved Antonia.

At this moment outside, the Inquisition demand that the gates of the castle be opened...

The Duke and his mistress are arrested for the abduction of girls (their innocence is quickly 'established'), while Ambrosio and Matilda are arrested as 'vile sinners' to be tortured.

In a dungeon, as he faces the questions of the Inquisition, the monk is even more Christ-like, prostrate upon his knees as if about to face the cross on Calvary. The Grand Inquisitor tells Ambrosio that Matilda has confessed all.

In the dungeon, in a chance meeting, Ambrosio sees the fragment now he had taken away at the beginning of the picture. Battered and disfigured from tortures, the man spits in defiance, "I believe in nothing now, neither in your God or your Devil!"

Ambrosio is taken to a chamber and confronts the devices that will torture him before his death. Every detail of his torture is ghastly explained by the Grand Inquisitor, of how he will be strapped in the wooden chair before him and wedges hammered slowly between his clamped ankles and knees, of how his body will lacerate and his bones will break. When this is over he will be burned at the stake in the public square.

That night as Ambrosio sits locked in a cell preparing himself for morning, and the moment his captors come to take him to be tortured, Matilda suddenly appears before him looking fresh and radiant and without chains.

"Would you like to avoid being tortured and burned?", she asks and offers the monk the ultimate temptation: sell his soul to the Devil and he will be free. The monk shuns the idea...until the sound of his captors' approach; it is morning. A book of souls appears and the monk signs it in his own blood, as the door to his cell is unlocked by guards. The Inquisition enters the cell. Nothing has changed; Ambrosio is still in the cell, the guards still before him. Nothing appears to have happened until the Grand Inquisitor says to Ambrosio, "What are you waiting for? You are free to leave!" The Grand Inquisitor also acknowledges the noise of the villagers gathered outside the cell, "Listen to that crowd, cheering you!"

As the monk makes his way to the cell doors and freedom, he pauses to lay his hand upon the deformed eye of one of the guards. When he draws his hand away the eye is normal. Ambrosio leaves the dungeon, walking toward the light of day as the movie comes to end.

Because of Kyrkou's often two-dimensional direction, *THE MONK* comes across looking at times more like an exposé of the church's hypocrisy than as a piece of fiction, needing little prompting to sink its teeth into the 'law' of Christendom: a trait just as attributable to *THE MONK*'S source material as it is to Bunuel and Carriera's screenplay.

Based on the Gothic novel by Gregory Matthew Lewis, "The Monk" (1796) was written very much as a reaction against the more sublime horror novels of the day, and was duly expurgated in later editions for its stark treatment of religious themes, rape, black magic and the Devil. Nevertheless Lewis manages to end his book with a moral, and it is quite interesting to compare how Bunuel and Carriera have taken the doomed hero Ambrosio from Lewis's novel and allowed him to win out in *THE MONK*, despite the self-destructive path that we believe he has surely taken. In the closing of the novel, Ambrosio is tried by the Inquisition but is inexplicably pardoned, only to find himself on the end of a more sinister fate: the Devil himself takes him; letting him fall on some cliffs, where his living body is torn apart by eagles, in a death struggle that lasts for six days. In Bunuel and Carriera's translation, Ambrosio becomes a Christ-figure, leaving his cell - and nonchalantly performing a miracle - to meet the cheering crowds awaiting outside. Without hitting a cinematic eyelid, Kyrkou has taken Bunuel and Carriera's script through its paces, from Franco Nero's first Christ-like appearance, right up to an ending that - while remaining unexpected - becomes more plausible with every passing minute. All of the rumors in church with regard to Ambrosio's fall from grace can be more keenly measured, step by step. From the moment he allows himself to be taken by the seductress disguised as Brother John, through every unchristian deed until his very 'mis-deeds' become so dastardly that, by the final scene, he has traveled a perverted full circle.

Father Ambrosio's 'Godliness' in the early part of *THE MONK* is so wrapped up within itself it has become distorted; Ambrosio has lost his personal perspective of good and evil; when the nun is found to

be in love with a man he sends her to be tortured. But Ambrosio works with good intentions; he does not what he thinks is right, but what he believes will be looked upon as being right. He is working within the government of the church and fear of the Inquisition, and individual morals come secondary to that government.

Of course, inquisitional distortion of good and evil and religious terrorism isn't a theme unique to THE MONK, but where movies such as THE DEVILS, MARK OF THE DEVIL and even the more contemporary THE FIDELIO (Hartford-Davis) seem to utilize this theme as a byword for scenes of torture and humiliation, only THE MONK shows any real contempt for its subject matter, daring to question the word of the Lord, and if not His word then our interpretation of it.

Certainly, Bunuel must have loved to work upon such a script, delving as it does so heavily into Christian belief and Christian doctrine, though much of THE MONK's surrealist qualities are more attributable to Kyron's - again - slightly left of professional skill behind a camera, then to the master of the surrealism himself, Bunuel. The sketchiness of the characters is a fine case in point. The Duke is simply a Duke, the Sick Mother is simply a Sick Mother, Antonio is simply a Virtuous Little Girl. As for Matilda, no explanation is made of her 'powers' or indeed her real interest in Ambrosio - it quickly becomes obvious in the film that Matilda isn't simply out for love (in Lewis's novel, Matilda is an 'evil spirit'), but then if THE MONK isn't Luis Bunuel's most surrealist work, it's certainly his most audacious. A masterpiece either way.

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GIORNI D'AMORE SUL FILO DI LAMA

(Italy, 1973)

Directed by Giuseppe Pellegrini

Reviewed by Lucas Balbo

Following a visit to a distant supermarket, I bought a pack of three tapes and chose MEUNTE AS RASOIR (translation: MURDER BY RAZOR BLADE) as the "free" tape, because the video box had a poster of a Klaus Kinski science-fiction film that is unreleased in France. LE CRME, 1974, (released as PRIMAL IMPULSE on video in the U.S. and sold as FOOTPRINTS ON THE MOON!). As usual with this sort of kinky label, the film inside had nothing to do with the box cover. It is GIORNI D'AMORE SUL FILO DI LAMA (translation: DAYS OF LOVE SPENT ON THE EDGE OF A BLADE). Almost unreleased anywhere, vaguely shown in France as CHASSE-CROISE SUR UNE LAME DE RASOIR (a close translation of the original title), this 1973 pearl was of interest mainly for the two principal actors: Erika Blanc and Peter Lee Lawrence. The latter one, a young charming blond man, famous for his westerns GARRINGO, 1969; ARRIVA SABATA!, 1970; ANCORA DOLLARI PER I MC GREGOR, 1970; LA PREDA E L'AVVOLTOIO, 1971; DIO IN CIELO, ARIZONA IN TERRA, 1972, but committed suicide shortly after this film. His real name was Karl Hirenbeck and he had the pseudonym of Arthur Grant in Germany and P.L. Lawrence in Italy, his acting skills were too often limited to looking nice which is exactly the case here. So as you may already guess, only MISS DEVIL'S NIGHTMARE herself made me watch this ludicrous Mafia "gielio". The plot consists of showing how Peter Lee Lawrence is going to prove that a girl, Erika, (someone he fell madly in love with shortly before she supposedly died) was a young journalist involved in a Mafia blackmail. She also has the habit of changing her typical adventuress wardrobe every few minutes as well as her pop fashion high-heel shoes. To be polite, this Italian quackie is one of the dumbest I have ever watched. The musical score sounds like supermarket background music. If in the next century, bad directors will have a pantheon, Giuseppe Pellegrini, would have a king's tomb in it (his only other credit known as UNA FORCA PER DJANGO, apparently an unreleased western!).

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